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Public Health Committee
Proposed H.B. No. 6200
An Act Concerning the Use of Long-term
Antibiotic Treatment for Lyme Disease

Thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Sandy Berenbaum. I am a Clinical Social Worker, licensed in the states of CT and NY, in private practice for the past 20 years, providing psychotherapy to children, adolescents and families. My major interest has always been children and families.

In 1991, just 4 years after I began private practice, I saw a 15 year old boy who went from being an Honors student to failing everything. He was paranoid, had psychotic features, and behavior problems that had never manifested prior to that time. His parents and I were considering the need for him to be admitted to an inpatient psychiatric facility, due to his severe and life-threatening psychiatric symptoms. Given his interest in the outdoors, we pursued the question of whether he had Lyme disease first.

Within a few weeks, a knowledgeable and experienced physician had made the diagnosis of Lyme disease, and began treatment. The road to recovery was long, with long term antimicrobial treatments, and some setbacks, but this child, who was too ill to even attend high school for a year and a half, went on to excel in college, graduate from Law School, and is a high functioning, taxpaying young man today, thanks to the clinical skills of a physician who knew Lyme disease to be the serious neurological illness that it is, and had the courage to treat him, despite the complexity of the illness, and the controversies surrounding the disease.

Since that time, I have seen more and more children and adults with serious chronic Lyme disease, who come to me for counseling after they are finally diagnosed. Some had suffered through years of misdiagnosis or ineffective treatment, and had become more debilitated, as a result. Many, many had been misdiagnosed with a mental illness, based on symptoms that *disappeared* after their Lyme disease was successfully treated. They in fact *had no mental illness*. The problem of Lyme patients being misdiagnosed with mental illness is, unfortunately, not uncommon.

In some families, several members are very ill, burdening the very functioning of the family in every way. The financial strain is enormous.

There are long waiting lists for first appointments with the doctors in CT who have the courage to treat chronic tick-borne diseases. Many patients are forced to go out of state for care. I often meet parents with children who are very ill, whose circumstances do not allow them to travel for treatment, and they have nowhere to take their sick child.

Without a law that protects doctors from being targeted for using their clinical judgment to treat Lyme effectively, few doctors will take the risk of being sanctioned for using their clinical expertise to treat Lyme disease and co-infections. And more patients will suffer from false diagnoses and inadequate treatment, compromising their health and functioning. The burden on our schools to provide supports and accommodations for these seriously ill children will continue to grow. The burden on our health care system will continue to grow, as the illness spreads while patients wait months for diagnosis and treatment. Many adults will become disabled, instead of being productive tax-paying citizens.

Please support the passage of Proposed bill 6200, for the sake of the citizens of our state, for the sake of your own families.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra K. Berenbaum, LCSW, BCD".

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